



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

THE SEWANEE REVIEW.

VOL. XII.]

JANUARY, 1904.

[No. 1.

THE AIMS AND METHODS OF LITERARY STUDY.

THAT within the past ten years there has been in this country a marked increase of interest in literature and literary studies is a statement that will scarcely be disputed by any person occupied with such matters. The growth of literary clubs, especially among women, the emphasis laid upon English literature in primary and secondary schools, the work done by university extension lecturers, and particularly the trend in our colleges and universities from purely philological to literary courses may be cited as evidences that the phenomenon exists. If these evidences are not enough, we may add to them the development of libraries, of the publishing business, and of literary departments in the daily newspapers. That this interest is more intense or more deep-seated than was the similar interest manifested in New England during the days of the Transcendental Movement need be neither affirmed nor denied; but it is naturally far more widespread, and it is certainly an advance upon whatever popular interest in literature was displayed during the two decades that followed the civil war.

The causes of the phenomenon need not be investigated too curiously. Throughout the world our generation has been critical rather than creative, and a critical age is in the main only another name for an epoch of literary studies. Then, to go somewhat deeper, great accumulation of wealth and great accompanying desire for luxury and for culture, which is a phase of luxury, coinciding with an era of self-conscious-

ness and of democratic development, must make for an increase in studies that themselves make for refinement, for personal distinction, and for relief from *ennui*. The very confusion of our age, which in all probability has affected its creative work disastrously, has driven many men and women to studies of a literary nature as to a kind of haven, even if this same confusion has often rendered their studies mainly nugatory, except as a moral sedative.

But while this increase of popular interest in literature and literary studies may be taken for granted and its causes need not be investigated, it hardly seems wise not to consider somewhat carefully the aims and methods of the eager students of literature we see on all sides, and to compare their ends and means with those ideal ends and means which, after a due survey of the field, we may set up for ourselves and for them. Such a setting up of ideals for other people is always hazardous; but if our methods of reasoning are both inductive and deductive, if we rely upon observation as much as upon theory, and upon common sense as much as upon either, we shall be able, perhaps, to reach some useful results. What, then, seem to be the aims of students of literature, as to-day we see them in this country applying themselves to their chosen and delightful work? In answering this question a rough classification of such students will be serviceable.

The most obvious division is into professional students and amateurs or dilettantes, but it is easy and necessary to divide further. Professional students of literature fall, I think, into much the same classes as other professional men. There are those who are born with an aptitude for letters, who become successful critics, noted teachers of literature, or men of letters who devote a portion of their creative energy to criticism, such as Mr. Howells and Mr. Henry James for our own epoch or as Ben Jonson and John Dryden among the elder writers. These are the leaders occupying, except when they are great geniuses, much the same position as the more eminent clergymen, lawyers, and physicians do. In the rank and file are found the minor critics, a majority of the teachers of literature, most of the itinerant

lecturers on literary subjects, and the book reviewers. These correspond with the safe, respectable practitioners whom most of us are glad to employ when we are ill. Below these, as in every other profession, come the utter mediocrities, the failures, and the quacks, about whom we need say nothing.

The amateurs are harder to classify. At their head, however, stands plainly the literary virtuoso, the man of refined taste who lives in an atmosphere of culture, and who, if he writes, is almost sure to illuminate whatever subject he touches. He frequently has other than literary interests, and he never has hard and fast obligations to publishers, readers, or students. A good type of such a virtuoso is Horace Walpole; another and very different type is Edward FitzGerald, the translator of Omar Khayyám, who, if he had been less of a recluse, would now probably be ranked among the greater English critics. Below the virtuoso comes what we may call loosely the cultivated man or woman who through natural instinct and training has acquired a love of books and a fairly wide knowledge of them, often considerable in one or more departments. We all know many such persons, although in busy America they are doubtless proportionally fewer in number than in England or in France. Below these come the serious and honorable aspirants for culture, the men and women who, in spite of meager educational opportunities and of lives full of other and more pressing cares and duties, seize every chance and means of cultivating themselves. Naturally, college and academy students, who may, in a short time, belong to one of the other groups already mentioned, must, at some period in their career, be numbered with these aspirants for culture. Finally, in the lowest class, fall the men and women who are entitled only to the unpleasant designation of smatterers, of whom, as of the quacks, we need take no further notice.

With regard, now, to the aims of all lovers of literature who are worthy of being in any sense classed as students, it is obvious that from many points of view the highest and most inspiring are those of the great critics and men of letters to whom literature, in some blended words of Keats, is a thing

of beauty, and therefore a thing of truth and a joy forever. But because these men are as much born to literary studies as Plato, about whose young lips the bees clustered, was born to golden eloquence, their aims and methods, while serviceable as ideal standards, must always be unattainable by the large majority; and this is true also of the aims and methods of the virtuoso, although these, while honorable, are not fully inspiring because they are less purely philanthropic in character, less founded on the noble idea of service to fellow-men. It follows that it is with the aims of the majority of literary students, whether professional or amateur, that we are most concerned, and in pursuing this subject let us ask and try to answer a fundamental question: Why do or why should men study literature?

If one is born with a bent to such study, it is a sufficient answer to our question to assert the existence of the bent, for we may assume that literature is a worthy object of knowledge, and that all worthy objects of knowledge deserve to be studied by chosen spirits. But there are few chosen spirits, and students of literature are very numerous. Is not this because there is implanted in all persons endowed with spiritual aspirations a desire, not merely of self-distinction (smatterers and mediocrities have this), but of drawing nearer to ideal beauty, truth, and goodness, preferably in some form of combination? And because in genuine literature ideal beauty, truth, and goodness are found in combination, expressed through the medium of language, with which, when it is our own, we are more familiar than we are with the mediums of expression employed by the sculptor, the painter, and the musician, do not more men and women seek the ideal through literature than through any other means save religion? Students of literature are numerous, then, and increasingly numerous, because they find through literature their easiest access to the ideal, a fact which is in part due to the cheapness with which books can be manufactured in an age of mechanical achievements.

But if a more or less conscious aspiration for the most accessible ideal be the basic reason for the popular interest

in literary studies, it would seem to follow that the aims and methods of the teacher and the student of literature ought to make for the attainment of ideal truth, beauty, and goodness in the fullest possible measure. The introduction of any antagonistic aim or method must necessarily militate against the attainment of the central purpose for which, according to our reasoning, literary studies are begun. An important consequence ensues. We do not draw nearer to ideal beauty, truth, and goodness in combination if we give the attainment of mere knowledge a disproportionate place in our aims and methods. Knowledge helps us to attain truth, but it does not prompt to, although it does direct, the realization of goodness in conduct and the appreciation of beauty. But we do not truly study literature unless thereby we gain wisdom in contradistinction to mere knowledge, and unless we also develop our æsthetic faculties and, what is far more to the purpose, become better men and women. Hence knowledge in relation to literature should always occupy an ancillary position—it should be the handmaiden charged with ushering us into the presence of the ideal. But what have our teachers and professors of literature, our editors of school and college texts, our writers of learned monographs and manuals, and finally our promoters of literary clubs and lecture courses to say about themselves in these premises? Do they not too frequently make mere knowledge the be-all and the end-all of their work? It is so easy for teacher and pupil to add fact to fact and call it studying literature—whereas in its best estate such attainment of knowledge about literature is only a means to culture, not culture itself; while in its worst estate it is a positive bar to culture.

Just here we may note a distinct advance that has been made in the past ten years. Most of the literary work that was done in our colleges and universities fell under the department of English and the direction of men who were trained philologists. What attention they gave to the English literature produced after the year 1600 was in the main perfunctory, and although there was no lack of great au-

thors and books prior to that year, these were seldom treated save as storehouses of philological facts. Now philology is an extremely interesting study, and it is by no means unimportant, whether considered in itself or in its relations with history and literature and other subjects of human inquiry. But unless admirably handled by the teacher, philology, like any other science, however valuable it may be in other respects, is of less value than literature as a means to culture. It aids us but slightly in our approach to the ideal, whereas literature aids, or should aid, us greatly. Fortunately during the past ten years this fact has been more and more recognized in American colleges and universities, until, in some institutions indeed, the balance has been tipped almost unfairly against philology. In England this does not seem to be the case if we may trust that dissident dissenter, Mr. Churton Collins; yet there a great amount of literary training has always been obtainable through the best of mediums, the Greek and Roman classics.

But while all our institutions of learning, schools and libraries, as well as colleges and universities, afford better facilities for the study of literature than they did a decade ago, the improvement is not yet great enough to warrant a large amount of self-approbation. Philology no longer stalks about in borrowed plumes; but the history of literature, which is a branch of culture history, is frequently studied to the exclusion of literature itself; and when great poetry and prose is put before the student, this is often done so mechanically and with such a lack of proportion in the treatment that the cause of culture is not greatly subserved. For example, deadly methods of analysis, supplemented by a terrifying apparatus of largely irrelevant questions, are in our schoolrooms daily applied to poems which were written to stir the emotions, not perplex the minds of unoffending children. In other words, the letter of literature is diligently conned, but the delicate spirit of literature—I was going to say—escapes both the teacher and the pupil—but it really does not escape at all. It remains, as it were, an Ariel imprisoned in the tree of knowledge, waiting for a Prospero to

give it freedom. Again, through over-emphasis and under-emphasis in their treatment of writers, our teachers and professors and lecturers and critics are giving the world of students and readers very narrow and distorted views as to the scope of that literature which is one of the main glories of the Anglo-Saxon race. I have often found that the names of important seventeenth and eighteenth century writers meant absolutely nothing, not to a schoolboy or an undergraduate but to a graduate student who intended to make literature his life work.

Perhaps just here, even at the risk of somewhat attenuating the strength of whatever arguments this discussion may involve, it will not be amiss for me to dwell for a moment upon what seem to be faults of our professional teaching and studying of literature that demand correction.

One, as hinted above, is the preponderating part in literary teaching and criticism played by analysis. It is the fashion with many critics to dwell upon the internal rather than upon the external features of a piece of literature, to dilate upon its qualities rather than upon what it is as a whole, to treat it as something to be dissected rather than to discuss its general effects upon readers at large and its position in the body of national or world literature. In other words, their criticism tends to be analytic and subjective rather than synthetic and objective. There is much room, of course, for such criticism, since it obviously serves to bring out beauties that would otherwise lie hidden and to intensify our interest in the writer and his work. Yet it is very questionable whether such analytic criticism should occupy so prominent a part or come so early in our literary training. After all it seems mainly to ask and answer the question, Why does this author appeal to us in such and such a way? But this is a question more important to a writer than to a reader. If we are undertaking to write poetry, by all means let us analyze great poetry and try to seize the secret of its power. If we are readers, however, it is perhaps better to try first to answer the questions, How has this writer affected others—that is, what ought we to

expect to find in him? and, How does this writer compare with others in his class—that is, should we devote ourselves to him as much as to some other and greater man?

It is at once plain that we have here in somewhat disguised forms the two well-defined methods of criticism for which those distinguished Frenchmen, M. Lemaître and M. Brunetière, and other critics ranged behind each of them have long been doing battle—methods of criticism which have, indeed, been in the world for ages and to which we give the names Impressionist and Academic. It is plain also that my complaint is that of late, and especially in our teaching of literature, we have not been giving academic criticism—the criticism of judgment—due consideration; that we have been overpartial to the criticism of interpretation, which tends more or less to be impressionist in character. I am constantly reading and hearing criticisms of books that make me wonder whether the analyzer has ever put together the qualities he discovers, whether he has ever grasped as a whole the piece of literature with which he is dealing. He talks of sublimity, charm, love of nature, etc., until I wonder whether he is not in the position of the proverbial person who cannot see the wood for the trees. It seems to me that it would be much more logical and profitable for our critics and teachers to begin with the criticism of judgment—for example, to judge a poem as a whole; to get its position, as near as one can in the poet's own works, in the class of poems to which it belongs, in the literature of the nation, and finally, if it be worth the pains, in the literature of the world. Then it would be logical and proper to pass to the more intensive method of analysis and interpretation, which would increase both our knowledge and our enjoyment. It is true that no one can entirely separate these two methods of criticising. We analyze somewhat when we are trying to determine what a poem or book stands for as a whole. But I am quite sure that in our school and college classes we give too much place to the analytic or interpretative method, with the result that, when we ought to be getting wide views of literature and life, we learn to

know a few works of a few writers only, trusting to time to introduce us to the rest. Time, however, is more like a slave driver than a master of ceremonies, and thus nine out of ten of us are throughout our lives confined to a mere hearsay acquaintance even with great authors, much more with minor ones.

From what I have just said, the reader will not be surprised to learn that I am somewhat skeptical as to the good results of much of the teaching of literature based on the so-called series of English classics, though I have contributed to such series myself; that I am not altogether convinced that the excessive attention paid to Shakespeare in schools and colleges is wise; that I doubt very much whether it is profitable to spend a term or a year on any one writer or small group of writers, unless it can be done in connection with courses that give a wide survey of the form of literature that is being studied; that I am inclined to think that all so-called "laboratory courses" in literature should be accompanied, as they are in the case of the natural sciences, by lectures that serve not merely to present the subject as a whole but also to set it in its historical and philosophical relations with other subjects of human inquiry and with life itself. I know that it is much easier to teach and learn a minute division of a subject, and that for purposes of imparting methods of study—that is, for graduate instruction—such division is often absolutely necessary. But I cannot perceive that our specialistic training is giving us the grasp upon literature that many of our untrained fathers and mothers had, and I think it is time for us to ask ourselves where we are and whither we are tending.

Nor should our queries be confined to the whereabouts and the whitherwards of the teachers of literature. The literary specialists who furnish us with admirably detailed studies and monographs often lead us astray by the importance they give to very minor writers or to small literary movements, and cause us to blunder by applying to literature that historic or, perhaps better, that pedantic estimate against which Matthew Arnold warned us. Yet the mono-

graphs and dissertations continue to come out, and we can easily swamp ourselves in the minutiae of scholarship, while philosophic criticism goes begging for adherents, and comparative literature attracts too few students. As a result, even the nomenclature of the art of criticism is at sixes and sevens. Think, for example, of how little definiteness attaches to the term "lyric." So also the application of the theory of evolution to the study of literature is yet in its infancy. Where, for instance, will one find a consistent and full account of the evolution of that highest form of lyric, the ode? No wonder that the students of the sciences look down upon us when we pose as anything but amateurs. No wonder that the late Mr. Freeman, the historian, spoke scornfully of us as chatters about poor Harriet Shelley, or that Mark Twain, after reading Prof. Dowden's treatment of the relations between Shelley and his unfortunate first wife, was constrained like a knight-errant to enter the lists against the biographer. When we have not chattered, we have in nine cases out of ten been grubbing, yet we are neither sparrows nor worms.

Still, even if all that I have just said by way of adverse criticism be well founded, it is undeniable that a great advance has been made in the study of literature viewed as a constituent element in the academic curriculum; it is equally undeniable that in this country in matters of culture we can never afford to confine our attention to the academic class. As we have seen, there is an immense and increasing amount of self-cultivation in literature being attempted by American men and women of all classes. What are the aims and methods of these people?

I am not sure that their aims are not often higher, I will not say than those of teachers generally—for I believe that the aims of our teachers are very high—but higher than those of the apparently more fortunate college student or professor, or of the minor critical writers and lecturers. These very frequently appear to me to be turning to the study of literature as a means for obtaining a livelihood or, as at present, a peculiarly easy method of exploiting a popular taste,

I will not say craze. We may posit, to be sure, in most cases a bent for literary studies; but very frequently a fair salary, a good social position, and a long vacation are more in evidence as motives to the assumption of a literary calling as college teacher than any æstrus sent by the gods to goad the aspiring spirit up the steep and arduous heights of culture. And as for the popular lecturer, it would at least appear easy for a soulful young man to persuade himself that it is his life work to lecture on Dante to a group of adoring women at so many dollars per head. On the other hand, eliminating the dabbling in literature done by men and women who think that a certain show of culture is desirable, it seems to me that the aims of a considerable portion of the amateur students of literature in this country are distinctly high, at least from a moral point of view. They are trying to elevate themselves by contact with the ideal, and there can be no higher individual aim. There is a tremendously impressive earnestness to be observed among such literary workers in every section of the country. And where this strenuousness is not visible, there is often a quiet, dignified pursuit of culture, though perhaps along narrow lines, to be found among persons whose vocations hardly suggest literary or artistic proclivities. It is plain, however, that all aspiration for self-culture is more or less lacking in that altruism which is to be seen, in some measure at least, in the aims of teachers and of other professional students, and that the methods of the amateur are, as a rule, less well-grounded and comprehensive than those of his fellow-worker.

From what has been said it would seem to follow that the aims of the professional student of literature need to be made more ideal and less practical, his methods more flexible and less mechanical, while the aims of the amateur should be made more altruistic and his methods less nebulous. How are these ends best to be attained?

I know of no better way than for the one class of literary students to keep constantly in mind the aims of the other class, and to consider carefully and partly adopt its methods of study. This is precisely what they do not do at present. The

critic is much too likely to smile with condescension at literary opinions advanced by people who have not read so many hundreds of books as he has. On the other hand, the literary amateur or the cultivated reader is much too likely to think that the critic is the slave of his own rules or a mere dry-as-dust whose opinion is pedantic and absurd. This is especially the case among Anglo-Saxons, who as a race have cherished a distrust of criticism, apparently on the principle that, as an Englishman's house is his castle, so his opinions ought to be surrounded by a moat of ignorance and prejudice. In other words, our two classes of literary devotees are in many respects sundered; whereas it appears, as I have just said, that each class should consider carefully and partly adopt the aims and methods of the other.

The professional student is constantly in danger of forgetting that the spirit of literature, not its mere external form or garb, should be the true object of his study. He forgets that study means zeal for, as well as application to, an object, and he is too seldom zealous for that ideal of truth, beauty, and goodness in combination which genuine literature embodies. The better class of amateurs, however, the men and women of acquired or accumulating culture, are nearly always more or less alive to the value of literature as a means to lift themselves from the plane of the real to that of the ideal. They are less likely than the professional student to use literary studies either as a practical means of livelihood or as an exercise of their purely intellectual faculties. On the other hand, the amateur, to whom literature is generally a side issue, is likely to make it a matter of merely personal gratification. He seldom has to consider the interests of others, whether as an expounder or a popularizer or what we may call a literary missionary. He can hold his own opinions regardless of what others think, can be as erratic as he pleases, can be selfish, and all the while can fall back upon the favorite maxim of the Englishman, which he often expresses in Latin, "*De gustibus non est disputandum*," there is no disputing about tastes. This selfish, nonaltruistic attitude toward something that is es-

entially noble and ideal cannot be good for any one. Perhaps there ought to be no disputing about tastes, but there ought to be calm discussion of them, and we should endeavor to make our own taste and that of our neighbor relish the highest possible forms of literature and art. Hence it is well for the amateur to do what the professional student must always do—consider the tastes of others, determine what has been the verdict of cultivated readers in the past with regard to the relative ranking of the various forms of literature and other cognate matters—in short, equip himself to pursue his favorite subject in a critical and not in a purely desultory and inconsequential manner.

But we have passed, almost without knowing it, from a discussion of aims to a discussion of methods. The methods of the professional student are naturally such as we loosely denominate critical, whether or not his bias be toward history or linguistics or æsthetics or his allegiance be given to the academic or the impressionist school. There is no time to discuss the best methods by which the critic or judge appraises the value of a work of literary art; what mainly concerns us is the fact that the chief danger that confronts the critic or the teacher is that his methods may easily become mechanical. Against this danger his best safeguard will, I think, be found in an application of the less hard and fast methods of study pursued by the amateur. The professional student should relax his mind by a limited following of his own bent in reading, by an indulgence at times in uncritical enthusiasm, by a frequent surrender of his spirit to the appeals of the ideal. He should remember the adage about the ever-stretched bow, and not forget that he has a soul as well as an intellect. On the contrary, the amateur has much to gain by endeavoring to catch something of that balanced judgment, that free play of mind that will always be found to characterize the true critic. He should not weight himself down with learning or cease to enjoy what he is laboring to apprehend; but he should endeavor to impart some system to his reading, and should avoid nebulosity and inconsistency in the judgments he forms upon literary topics. For

example, he should not wade through without a murmur the theology with which Dante overloads "The Divine Comedy," and inveigh against that with which Milton overloads "Paradise Lost." Above all, he should avoid the prevailing lack of critical catholicity. He should strive, for example, to appreciate both Byron and Shelley, and not decry the one in order to laud the other.

The mention of Byron leads naturally to a consideration of the only other point I wish to make in this paper. Byron is, of all modern English poets—indeed, of all modern Englishmen save Scott—the one who has had most influence upon the continental public; he is, of all modern English poets of eminence, the one toward whom most opposition, not to say rancor, has been displayed by native critics. Of late it has been growing more and more plain, I think, that British and American depreciation of Byron has ridiculously overshoot the mark; that while certain technical defects, not obvious to foreigners, must be emphasized by Anglo-Saxon critics—not for the purpose of running down Byron, but for the sake of warning present and future poets against his mistakes—the point of view of the foreign critics is far more sound and catholic than that of almost any English critic save Matthew Arnold. Whether this be true or not, it is abundantly clear that no student of literature, whether professional or amateur, can afford either to ignore foreign criticism of his own literature or to neglect to obtain a fair knowledge at least of the chief European literatures, either in the originals or through translations.

In this connection it is a pleasure to refer to a paper by Mr. Edmund Gosse, entitled "The Isolation of the Anglo-Saxon Mind," which appeared about two years ago in the *Cosmopolitan* magazine. Mr. Gosse has never given better proof of his critical acumen than in this warning against the growing insularity of the English mind. He naturally and, as it seems to me, correctly attributes much of the English ignorance and indifference with regard to what foreigners are doing in the world of letters to the rise of rampant imperialism which has been coincident with the growth

of Mr. Kipling's popularity. As we Americans have done a little in the imperial line ourselves, and have developed our own "strenuous" literature, Mr. Gosse rather logically includes us with his own countrymen, and warns us also against the deplorable effects of mental isolation. While admitting the force of much that he says, I cannot, however, think that any such marked isolation since 1895 can be found in America as he seems to have observed in Great Britain. The growing vogue of French and Russian novelists in translation—Balzac, Daudet, George Sand, Flaubert, Maupassant, and even Gautier among the French, as well as Turgenev, Tolstoi, and other Russians, have recently been made accessible to us in whole or in part; the increasing number of scholarly and popular books on French and German literature; the lecture courses given at our great universities by distinguished French scholars—these facts seem to me to indicate that the American mind is not closing itself to foreign influences. It surely has not closed itself to German scholarship; and while one occasionally reads a blatantly chauvinistic article or an insularly ignorant book, I suspect that we have a right to regard ourselves as intellectually a very wide-awake people.

It does not follow, however, that Mr. Gosse's warning is not worth heeding. Conceit will speedily make any man or nation ignorant, and we are by no means free from conceit, whether as individuals or as a people. We are rightly proud of our literary achievements, especially of those of the entire race of which we are coming to be the most important branch; but this should not blind us to the fact that there are other Teutonic peoples with literatures worthy of study, nor to the equally important fact that there is a very great body of Romance literature well worthy of vying with our own and supplementing it admirably. Yet when I assert, as I am frequently forced in fairness to do, that in my judgment the French literature of the nineteenth century is perhaps, if not probably, superior to that produced in England during the same period, it is always easy for me to perceive that in nine cases out of ten the fact

that such may possibly be the case has not before dawned upon any of the persons doing me the honor to listen to me. In other words, it rarely occurs to us to think that we have not a monopoly of literary as well as of all the other virtues, whereas we not only have no monopoly of the virtues, we have not even a monopoly of the vice conceit, other races pushing us very closely in conceit, ignorance, and their concomitant bellicosity. But surely conceit, ignorance, and bellicosity are things to be avoided by the attainment of a cosmopolitan outlook upon literature and life. If, as some persons inform us, the instinct of racial self-preservation is opposed to cosmopolitanism, so much the worse for the racial instinct. Humanity as a whole is greater than any of its parts, and the unity of the whole human race in its ideals has been the goal of religion and art and literature and science since man began his arduous, upward march of progress. It is impossible to believe that this goal will ever be really lost sight of or that it can be achieved by any one race, particularly by any race that relies on mental inbreeding for its progeny of ideas, or that depends on its muscles to do the work of its brains. Mr. Gosse enforces his warning by a homely story of a young Londoner who was brought almost to his grave by a never-varied diet of mutton chops. It would be quite possible for a nation to be brought to an intellectual grave, or at least to a stagnation like that to be observed in China, if, as is most improbable at this stage of the history of Western Christendom, it were, for any long time, to narrow its mental diet to the works of its own writers, and especially to the works of contemporary authors.

Now, as I have intimated, I do not believe that any modern nation is in such a state of mental isolation or is likely to reach it. But there are always millions of persons in every generation who, often through no fault of their own, suffer from such isolation. I know many teachers, writers, and otherwise great scholars who suffer from it badly. But our ideal literary student should not. In addition to endeavoring to combine in his work of self-culture the methods employed both by the professional student and by the literary

amateur, he should always aim to look at every problem that confronts him from the cosmopolitan point of view, a point of view not to be attained without labor or without cordial sympathy with the best spirits of other nations. For example, it would seem almost impossible, did I not know it to be a fact, for men aiming at ideal culture to educate themselves without the least reference to the work of Count Tolstoi or with an explosive wrath against it. National and individual isolation in literature is, therefore, just as much to be shunned as the mechanical methods of the professional student and the desultoriness of the amateur.

I am well aware, in conclusion, that all that I have said may be rightly pronounced extremely general, and, in so far, more or less commonplace, inadequate, and difficult of application. But it must be remembered that literature, holding as it does by the ideal, is, like the ideal, always eluding us. No one has ever succeeded in satisfactorily defining literature, much less in telling us exactly how best to appreciate and study it. In fact, if one could teach literature with the precision with which one can teach mathematics, would the fascinating study be itself? would it not lose much of its fascination?

But apart from the comparative impossibility of laying down hard and fast, concrete methods of studying literature to advantage, it should be remembered, I think, that a statement of sound general principles is often of great positive utility in furnishing us with a proper point of departure for our own studies and investigations. It is in their statement of general principles that the great critics are as a rule most illuminating and instructive. For this reason the "Poetics" of Aristotle, as Mr. Courthope has just shown us in his admirable book entitled "Life in Poetry, Law in Taste," is of as much value to us as it was to that philosopher's contemporaries, and of greater value than it was to critics of two centuries ago, because the latter emphasized and misapprehended minor and special statements, whereas we emphasize rather Aristotle's profound generalizations. For this reason, too, I venture to think, certain essays of Matthew Arnold's—

for example, that on the "Study of Poetry" prefixed to Ward's "English Poets"—will mean more to posterity than the far more brilliant essays of his contemporary, James Russell Lowell. It is, I repeat, most important to obtain a safe point of departure from sound generalizations. It is like having the union station in a town we are leaving pointed out to us. We may take the wrong train after we enter the station; but if we go wandering about the town, we shall get no train at all.

I am not sure, of course, that the generalizations I have given are worthy of confidence, but experience teaches me to think that they are. I believe that the reason why men and women are turning more and more to literary studies is that they find in them the readiest means of access to the ideal. I believe that those students who, like myself, make a profession of letters are constantly in danger of mistaking the letter of literature for its spirit, and of pursuing mechanically a study that should engage the highest faculties of mind and heart and soul. Hence I am sure that the professional student will find it profitable always to bear in mind the aims and methods of the lovers of literature, whom for convenience we call amateurs. On the other hand, I am convinced that, while the aims of many amateurs are high, their methods of approaching literature are often narrow, inconsistent, unintelligent, and their purposes too self-centered. They can, therefore, profit greatly by following the guidance of competent critics and teachers—in other words, by acknowledging some authority in matters of taste besides their own sweet wills. In short, I give my allegiance neither to an aristocracy of letters, a so-called class of cultured Mandarins in whom all learning resides, nor to a democracy of letters, in which every man's judgment is as good as his neighbor's, but to a constitutional republic of letters like the United States in politics—a republic in which there are both aristocratic and democratic classes or estates, which can flourish only through mutual intelligence and coöperation and through cultivating the friendliest international relations. In other words, we need a critic to do for students

of English and American literature what Burke has done for students of English and American politics. After we get him we may perhaps look forward to the time when a great modern Aristotle shall apply the critical method to the chaos of knowable things, and give the world a "Synthetic Philosophy" that shall surpass even the monumental labors of Herbert Spencer. In the meanwhile we whose functions and aspirations are much humbler may labor while we wait, may somewhat lighten his labors, and may prepare men and women to appreciate them. For to prepare men and women to study literature is really to prepare them to appreciate the highest mental and moral achievements.

W. P. TRENT.

Columbia University, New York City.